AODA Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 25, 2021
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Google Meet

In Attendance (22 members)

Anthony Anirud	Sue Hastings	Susie Nunes	Carolyn Viney
Dale Brusselers	Paul Lee	Derek Petri	Scott West
Teresa Estriga	Gail Long	Steve Rutledge	Paul Woods
Dawn Forsyth	Gilbert Luk	John Sellers	Brandon Wu
Amanda Halley (designate)	Stephanie Luong	Andrew Snowball	Nadia Zamzul
	Ralph Masciello	Shane Taylor	

Regrets

Hirosh Abeywardane; Pam Beetlestone; Rizwana Kaderdina; Shelly Khushal; John Kostic; Laura Leesti; John Malcolm; Bob McRoberts; Patrick Smith; George Vellathottam.

1. Welcome and Agenda Overview

Welcome address and agenda overview by co-chairs, Anthony Anirud and Brandon Wu. Welcome to and brief introduction by new committee member Scott West, replacing Gerry Harrison (retired) as union representative for OSSTF District 16.

2. Land / Relationship Acknowledgement

Action Item

Committee members were encouraged to listen to [Tune In YRDSB Podcast](#) "As Long As The Rivers Flow: Focussing on Connections to Treaties - Part 2".

Andrew Snowball shared land acknowledgement as introduction to leading the committee through a virtual "Kairos blanket exercise". Andrew presented hypothetical scenario on death, COVID-19 pandemic and colonization to promote personal self-reflection.

Brandon then highlighted self-reflection and reflexivity in the podcast as way of looking at ourselves more critically. What are our values? How do they translate into our attitudes and behaviours? In terms of disability, attitudes towards people with disabilities (e.g., ableism) continue to be the most pervasive barriers to accessibility.

3. Approval of Previous Minutes

Minutes reviewed and motion carried to approve November 26, 2020 minutes. Minutes are now posted online and available to the public under "AODA Advisory Committee".

4. Professional Learning - Accommodation Scenarios and Discussion

Brandon presented three different individualized accommodation scenarios and their possible implications for system-wide accessibility. Committee members were asked to consider the following discussion questions for each scenario:

1. What type of barriers to accessibility impact the scenario? (e.g., attitudinal, physical, info/communication, technology, systemic)

2. Are there any relevant competing rights situations at play?

3. What is the decision-making process for accommodating (or not accommodating) this request?

4. What are the potential implications for removing similar barriers across the system?

Accommodation Scenario 1

A teacher who is hard of hearing makes an accommodation request for their students and colleagues to be given clear masks. The teacher can read lips and would like to continue doing so despite the mask and face shield policies in place.

The teacher would like to remain in their current position and does not want to move to virtual school.

Accommodation Scenario 2

A student in an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) community class is known to drool and play with their saliva, and frequently removes their mask. Staff working in the classroom are therefore required to wear gloves and gowns in addition to masks and face shields.

An educational assistant (EA) in the classroom still feels unsafe working with this student and is now submitting a work refusal. They request to be transferred out of the classroom, but do not want to work in a virtual school environment.

Accommodation Scenario 3

The parent of a student who has low vision and is learning to use a white cane feels that traditional water fountains pose a safety hazard. Their child has bumped into the water fountain on several occasions because they are not able to scan the elevated water fountain with their white cane.

The parent is requesting that bottle filling stations that are built into the wall (i.e, bottle filler only, no fountain) be installed to replace all current water fountains throughout the school.

5. Subcommittee Status Updates

Representative(s) from each subcommittee or working group shared accessibility and/or related updates with the committee.

Barrier Buster and Built Environment

- **Braille signage projects** - Signage throughout Stonehaven PS and Michael Cranny are now complete; Keswick HS is 99% complete with a couple of changes required in order to align with fire plan.

- **James Robinson PS door widening** - community classroom doors were widened to comply with AODA/OBC standards.

- **Holland Landing PS washroom accessibility** - Measurements have been taken and layout completed for conversion of identified storage area into all-access

washroom; school will be prioritized with the other schools that require major renovations in order to install all-access washrooms.

- **Prospectus for new schools** - Four new schools approved and architects must submit prospectus that consider accessibility into major school designs and site plans; for example, at least half of doors must have mechanical door operators, including the main entrance; must have barrier-free parking with paved access to main entrance and paved play areas; also considerations for accessible washrooms, shower facilities and community gardens; prospectus are done in partnership with applicable municipalities.

Human Resources Subcommittee

- **Disability Management (DM)** - DM team continues to support return to work plans and virtual workplace accommodations through EVS; reviewing medical and Board-approved PPE (including voice amplifications systems).

- **Voice amplification systems** - due to mask and face shields requirements, increased requests for voice amplification systems across the system; supply and demand concerns with voice amplification systems moving forward given increased demand.

- **Employee wellness resources** - Board's Wellness Committee has made available COVID-19 and mental health and wellness resources on [YRDSB Sharepoint site](#), including employee wellness, community resources, employee and family assistance program (EFAP) webinars and recordings.

- **Virtual recruitment and redeployment** - all practicums and written tests are now administered and completed online, interviews done via GoToMeeting (sometimes Zoom and Google Meet); some applicants who did not have access to technology or internet went in-person to EC Aurora; staff are being redeployed into EVS on ongoing basis (with consultations and support from unions).

Student Services Subcommittee

- **Assistive Technology Consultants (ATC)** - Facilitated professional learning for the Digital Learning Consultants (DLC) and Parent Engagement team on accessibility and to build capacity to provide accessible materials from the

outset; first session was on the basics of AODA and second session was on developing resources; Consultant group also created and delivered many AODA compliant professional learning opportunities to the system on January 15, 2021 for Educational Assistants.

- **Special Education Plan 2020-2021** - Sections of the plan are undergoing thorough review for AODA compliance; for example, reformatting items previously put in charts into more accessible formats allowing for screen readers; sections of the plan that have been approved by SEAC are then made into accessible PDFs to be posted on the public-facing website.

- **Deaf Hard of Hearing (DHH) Services** - Ensuring DHH students have equitable access to spoken language and feel included in their F2F and online classrooms; face masks, shields, and physical distancing protocols greatly degrade the speech signal, making spoken language unintelligible; huge efforts have been made to use technology to provide both acoustic and visual access.

- **Hearing Assistive Technology (HAT)** - We continue to process new SEA claims for HAT to ensure all DHH students have personal amplification technology or a soundfield speaker in their classrooms; for virtual students, Boom microphones have been purchased for teachers with additional cables, cords and splitters for students/families to connect HAT to their laptops and/or Chromebooks; DHH Teachers continue to collaborate with classroom teachers, SERTs and parents, to support the use of HAT in F2F and virtual classrooms.

- **Pilot for web captioning** - DHH staff have worked in collaboration with the ATCs to explore remote captioning technology; DHH staff provide guidance and coaching on how to effectively use captions on different platforms, as well alternative language transcriptions (French Immersion) and translation supports for families who cannot access spoken English; we are currently engaged in a trial of personal captioning, which will link Hearing Assistive Technology with Chromebook/iPad captioning at student desks.

- **Blind Low Vision (BLV) Services** - Ensuring that students with low vision who must learn virtually are provided with accessible materials in a timely manner;

many educators are new to Google Classroom and creating Google Docs and forget to consider that students with low vision may not be able to access them (e.g., videos need both captions and "described video" for all students to benefit from them).

- **Teachers of Students With Visual Impairments (TSVI)** - Available to assist in procuring copies of videos with described video or can provide the described video for their students; TSVIs are also reformatting Google Docs to make them accessible for screen reading software, and provide in-service to educators on what to do differently moving forward.

- **Pilot for MacBook Air accessibility** - BLV Services Team participated in professional learning with MacBook Air computers for one month; Apple Accessibility Consultant provided workshops on how to navigate and utilize MacBook Air accessibility features for students with low vision; ITS is creating various templates to pilot the new MacBook Air SEA claim computers for students who are blind, PC Computers with fulsome screen reader software tools (i.e., JAWS) and refreshable electronic braille devices (i.e., BrailleNote Touch) continue to be the best option for online accessibility.

- **New ASTM approved masks** - Carolyn Viney brought forward a new type mask that is ASTM approved by the province; new masks are blend of fabric and "clear masks" to better support wearing goggles instead of face shields to maintain sound quality; awaiting arrival of new masks.

- **Caring and Safe Schools** - ongoing discussion and work around bias-aware progressive discipline with administrators, and how to accommodate in the online world; working in partnership with other departments regarding GAPPS profile images and new processes in place to address concerns.

Digital Media, Website Management & Learning Working Group

- **New YRDSB website** - New website will be accessible and translatable, with built-in accessible features such as automatic alt text prompts and new accessible newsletter blogs; working with ITS and LD&D to finalize content contributor training modules; targeting a spring launch for the new website.

Curriculum Working Group

- **Accessibility professional development modules** - HRCO is working with LD&D to develop accessibility (and human rights) professional development modules beyond compliance training requirements; draft accessibility module to be shared with subcommittee at next meeting.

6. Accessibility News Items and Member Q & A

I&C Standards 2020 Final Recommendations Report

AODA legislates that each accessibility standard undergo review every four years. The Information and Communications (IC) Standards Development Committee completed and submitted their [legislative review](#) on February 28, 2020 to the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

Four areas for improvement noted by the IC Standards Development Committee were:

1. **Research and feedback**: Data and information based on experiences of people with disabilities are heavily biased by lobby groups;

2. **Bounded by current standards**: process needs to be more responsive to on-the-ground realities;

3. **Timing and permanency**: Reviews are periodic by nature and should be ongoing by full-time professional appointees; and

4. **Encourage risk and failure**: Failures of disability regulations culture has to be acknowledged; meeting minimum accessibility standards should not be the benchmark.

Ministry has yet to respond to the recommendations report, which does have implications for YRSDB if they are all accepted.

Action Item

Brandon to follow up with subcommittees and working groups regarding relevant recommendations, and will inform Committee once Ministry responds to recommendation report.

Pac Rim 2021 International Conference on Disability and Diversity

HRCO is pleased to be presenting at and attending the virtual Pac Rim 2021 conference on March 1 and 2, 2021.

- **Poster Presentation (asynchronous)** - A Human Rights-Based Approach to Addressing Accessibility Within a Social Justice Lens: The Experience of York Region District School Board; and

- **Skill Share (synchronous/live)** - Accessible Content Core Skills: Building more accessible learning and working environments at York Region District School Board.

7. Upcoming Meeting Dates and Adjournment

- Next meeting scheduled for April 29, 2021.

Meeting adjourned.